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ABSTRACT

Noting that while individuals need opportunities to develop cognitive and symbolic understanding of communication principles and skills, this paper argues that they also need to develop an experiential understanding in order to use those principles and skills in building and enhancing relationships. To accomplish this, the paper offers a three-phase approach for use in teaching and learning principles and skills in interpersonal communication. The paper then discusses each phase of the approach, which includes (1) an awareness phase, in which understanding of principles and skills is to be achieved on a cognitive/symbolic level; (2) an assimilation phase, in which understanding of the principles and skills is at an experiential/feeling level; and (3) an application phase, in which understanding is at both the cognitive/symbolic and the experiential/feeling level. In addition, the paper provides a list of ways to facilitate each level of learning. The paper then defines human communication and discusses four principles and skills that help clarify the communication process. (FL)

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A THREE PHASE APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

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A THREE PHASE APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

I. INTRODUCTION

Emphasis is shifting in studying communication processes from a major concern with sender-message-receiver paradigms to a focus on the human being as the central element in the interaction (Berlo, 1960, Watzalwick, et.al., 1967; Pace and Boren, 1975; Pauly, 1977; Baskin and Bruno, 1977; Bochner, 1978). A new set of principles and skills emerges as the human being is viewed in purpose-oriented interchanges with others and the environment. Principles are cognitive constructs which humans develop to understand and use to control process in an ever-moving environment. Skills are behaviors developed to utilize principles governing perceived phenomena.

There are at least two levels of understanding principles: a cognitive/symbolic level and an experiential/feeling level. Skills can also be developed at these two levels. A person can conceptualize a "listening process" or a "separation of worlds process" and have little ability to utilize these skills in better understanding self or others with whom they interact in the environment. A cognitive understanding precedes the experiential understanding but too often the teaching/learning process stops with the cognitive level understadning (Hall, et.al., 1975).

Douglas Hall, et.al. (cited in Pace, 1977, p.38) has pointed out five distinct advantages of using an experiential model as part of a teaching/learning process.

1) Learning is more effective when it is an active rather than passive process.
2) Problem-centered learning is more enduring than theory-based learning.
3) Two-way communication produces better learning than one-way communication.
4) Participants learn more as they share responsibility for the learning process.
5) Learning is more effective when thought and action are integrated.

In almost all disciplines where skill is expected as part of the outcome of the teaching/learning exchange, there is a part of the program for a "hands on" approach toward gaining an experiential understanding of the process. Principles and skills involved in human interactions are more complex than principles and skills involved in working with physical or mechanical properties that can be controlled and manipulated. Equal time would be well spent on the teaching/learning of principles and skills in human communication where control and manipulation are negative factors in the overall transactions.

In a study involving three separate groups Strong (1980a) found a relationship between skill development and a laboratory experience involving a time frame. He concluded that the cognitive understanding can be learned fairly well in minimal amounts of time but skill development takes longer periods of time and specific work on developing the skills.

II. A THREE PHASE APPROACH TO PRINCIPLE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

There are three phases to learning to assure both a cognitive and experiential understanding of the principles and skills. The first phase is an awareness process, the second phase is an assimilation process, and the third phase is an implementation process.

Diagram 1 about here

A. Phase I

Phase I is an awareness phase where understanding of principles and skills are to be achieved on a cognitive/symbolic level. Activities are engaged in to bring about awareness of the principles and skills at that level. Often these principles and skills seem like common sense to the

participants but they have not formally conceptualized them for understanding the communication process. There is an importance in the first phase to see the inter-relationship between the principles as they influence interaction.

Some important ways to facilitate the teaching/learning experience in Phase I are:

1) Specified readings which discuss particular principles followed by a discussion.

2) Using case studies or situational experiences to critique the use/effectiveness of the principles in governing the interaction. Thought can be directed to how the situation, or case study, might have turned out differently if appropriate application of principles had been made.

3) Role playing of a particular principle, using both the positive and negative aspects of the principle, will help develop understanding. The more the individual sees the relationship between specific principles and possible outcomes, the more prepared they become for Phase II of the learning process.

4) Observation logs are a way to start an internalization of the cognitive/symbolic understandings. Individuals select a few, perhaps three, principles to observe over the next time frame--usually a week. First, they give a personal definition of the principle. What does it mean to them? Here an instructor/facilitator can help the individual re-conceptualize the principle if it hasn't been understood adequately. Second, the indivudual cites a situation--observation of others, or between self and others, or within self--in which the principle applied

in interaction. Third, an analysis of how the use, or mis-use, of the principle influenced the interaction.

5) Written assignments where particular principles and skills are worked on for understanding. For example, a listening and speaking analysis is given for a two week period. Individuals are asked to chart their perceived interaction with another person over that time period. They are instructed to not try to make changes in their behavior but to establish a pattern of how they are interacting. This one written exercise allows them to view their listening and speaking patterns on 18 different principles involved in those two processes for two weeks. At the close of that period, they then reflect on the patterns they see and how these influence their interaction with that other person.

6) Films and video tape scenes are another way to help the individual see the principles and skills in interaction and the influence they have on the overall communication process.

Appropriate cognitive/symbolic understandings are essential to skill development and an experiential/feeling understanding in Phase II. Once a cognitive/symbolic understanding of a principle, or skill, is made, the individual is ready to go on to Phase II where assimilation of that principle or skill is made. Learning principles and skills is a little like learning a foreign language. An individual lags behind in the use of the principle or skill compared to the understanding of it.

B. Phase II

Phase II is an assimilation phase where understanding of the principles and skills are at an experiential/feeling level. This level of

learning is of a different order (see Middleman and Goldberg, 1972; Hall, et.al., 1975; Kolb, Rubin and McIntyre, 1974; and Pace, 1977) than a cognitive/symbolic understanding. The emphasis of this order is to develop a "feeling" for the principle and skill in the interaction--much like gaining a feeling for riding a bike as compared to seeing someone else ride a bike. Activities in this phase are of the "hands on" experience for assimilating the principles and skills intrapersonally. Ways to facilitate this level of learning are:

1) Structured laboratory experiences to develop specific skills and experience specific principles. An example of this is an experience of sharing positive and negative experiences. Each member shares an experience of one type or the other. Group members work on the skills of verification feedback and separation of worlds. This experience is critiqued by group members after everyone has had a turn to share an experience from their world. The laboratory experience followed a discussion session--Phase I. A second example is the structured experience of assessing states-of-being. Each member prepares for this laboratory experience by making a self assessment of what they are feeling on two separate days. The laboratory experience begins with each person assessing their own state-of-being. A focus person is selected who does not respond verbally to any of the group member observations until after everyone has had a change to share their impressions as to "how" the focus person's state-of-being is. Skills of image building and checking out impressions along with separation of worlds and verification feedback are practiced.

The laboratory group members prepare for each experience by making a pre-lab assessment. They specify particular objectives they want to reach as well as work toward specific skill development. A post-lab analysis is made by each group member at the close of the group experience. Objectives are reviewed and areas of need can be specified as objectives for future laboratory experience.

2) Written assignments of a second order also help in the experiential learning and assimilation of the principles and skills. For example, individuals are assigned a second two week period for listening and speaking action. The first time--Phase I--was to see patterns and influences. This second time--Phase II--is to work on making changes in the interaction. Individuals select a few areas and work to make specific change in those areas in their desired ways.

3) A set of structured sharing experiences has become a very important way for individuals to tie together all the principles and skills they have become aware of and are assimilating within their existence. The sharing experience is set up so each individual shares a set of concepts with a partner and helps the partner find an awareness of these concepts within his/her own relationships. These concepts are often mutually selected by both the individual in the course/workshop and their selected partner. A meaningful presentation remains the responsibility of the individual in the course/workshop.

Usually by the third or fourth set of shared experiences about communication concepts, the individual responsible for

meaningful interaction starts to see the inter-relationship between all the principles and skills covered. The sharing of experiences usually come two to three weeks after the course/ workshop experience of discussion and laboratory structured experience.

C. Phase III

Phase III is the application phase where understanding is at both the cognitive/symbolic level and the experiential/feeling level. Emphasis is shifted towards helping others understand the process and work through situations where correct use of communication principles and skills would make for better (more desirable) interactions. Ways to facilitate this type of learning are:

1) A structured set of sharing experiences. By the third or fourth set of experiences, the individual responsible is helping their partner process through situations where a desired change is manifest. This often involves a skill development part in the interaction for the partner--a mini Phase II experience. Most often it involves the partner's awareness as to how particular principles and skills influence the patterns of interaction and how intervention can take place.

2) Case studies via films or video tapes are used to look at intervention strategies as communication process is observed. Individuals now look at the inter-relationship within principles and skills to see how they influence the interaction. Desired changes are viewed, hypothetically, from the point of view of each person in the interaction. The interaction is treated from

the systems (Speer, 1970; Strong, 1980b) perspective and not just on individual points of view. This reinforces the interrelationship of principles/skills and people in process.

Small group work, after individual reflections, helps each course/workshop member develop a larger scope for seeing process. Small groups allow for a lot of individual exchange, followed by large group discussion to confirm or clarify some particular concepts, which ties the experience together.

3) Final examination--where used--is application oriented. Individuals are reminded that there is no way to cram for the final. It is at Phase III and cramming is good only for Phase I.

4) Individuals can be selected, on self interest and instructor judgement, to facilitate future structured laboratory group experiences. This does two things:

    a) It gives the individual an opportunity to experience a facilitating role--Phase III--in another setting. Individuals in these structured experiences often relate better to a peer than to the instructor who is perceived differently via the classroom/workshop setting.

    b) It frees up instructor time for other activities. The instructor does visit the structured laboratory experiences occassionally, but he/she participates as a group member with the facilitator working that role.

The facilitator is a model and a catalyst--not a director. Co-facilitators are selected part way through the experience which allows for the designated facilitator to observe more which helps in the critique at the end of each laboratory

experience.

5) Life is the final area where application can be made. When individuals have learned Phase I and II levels of understanding about the principles and skills, they continue on in Phase III once they have finished the course/workshop. Often a report comes back as to how a particular situation was modified by appropriate application of principles/skills--Phase III at its best. There is instrinsic reward in Phase III in life. The credit/instructor/facilitator influences become of much less concern as motiviation arises out of better relationships.

There are three phases to learning and teaching principles and skills of human communication. These overlap at times but understandings are sequential. A member, who had an experiential understanding of the verification feedback skill at a personal essence level, was asked to describe the principle so others could understand. Her reply was to the effect until you have experienced the interaction there is no way to understand the interaction. Phase II and Phase III orientations need to be included in courses/seminars/workshops where principles and skills are to be learned.

Another important aspect of learning/teaching principles and skills of human communication rests in what is to be learned/taught. In a "state of the art" article, Art Bochner (1978) called for a definition of interpersonal communication which pays attention to the people, messages, relationships with others in temporal conditions, skills that apply in various settings and concerns of intrapersonal, interpersonal and situational factors. He states: "It is difficult to find a definition of interpersonal communication which does justice to the dynamic character of these phenomena (1978, p.181)."

The following definition of human communication with the attendant principles and skills in the process was developed after a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) approach. These ideas are not new, for the most part, but have come from an evolvement of communication interactions of a functional nature. The definition will be given first with some minor explanations of function. Principles and skills needed to carry out the process will be given larger explanation.

III. DEFINING HUMAN COMMUNICATION

The definition used in the Human Communication Model (Strong, 1980a) is: Human Communication is the creation of meaning within a perceiver in response to internal stimuli from the self and external stimuli from others and the environment, and the transmission of signals which represent personal meanings.

Each individual is composed of an existing self and a perceiving self. Within the perceiving self is a focus center which selects specific stimuli for processing into the meanings for that individual. The existing self is the sum of existance of the individual, per se. It is composed of a life-giving element and a physical body. The life-giving element has a certain tempermental field that influences the perception process. The perceiving self is the processing function of the individual that orders--creates meaning from--the perceived stimuli coming from sensory receptors within the physical body. The existing self is the sum of meaning created out of cognitive and experiential understandings.

DIAGRAM 2 about here

Meaning is a key part of the human communication model. Humans are searching for order/purpose in their existence. There is an ecology of

existence in which individuals can discover their purposes in a cosmic frame versus creating a misfit of order in a smaller self plane (Frankl, 1967). Some individuals seem to search for new levels of order in a universe while others are content with a current status of order. However, disrupt the order (meaning) for any person and they will try to re-order their existence.

The creation of meaning within this model is the process of developing a frame of reference in an orderly manner from all the stimuli processed. Meaning is the relationship (MacKay, 1961) between events, elements, feelings, belief and other existence of each individual. The perceiving self is trying to take in stimuli from internal and external sources and harmonize it. Dissonance comes when internal stimuli from the existing self is in perceived contradiction to external stimuli. The perceiving self may act in congruence to or incongruence to the existing self. Certain external and internal stimuli are not focused on in given situations so as to try to reduce the dissonance that would need to be reconciled in order to maintain meaning for existence.

In interpersonal interactions the perceiving self selects existing self stimuli to present to the other person as a function of how the other person is perceived to respond to the stimuli. If trust is high, disclosure is more complete.

Non-verbal stimuli are generally not controlled by the perceiving self. These non-verbal stimuli come out of the existing self--the sum of what one is. (There might be slight control over non-verbal stimuli by the perceiving self if there is self awareness of specific non-verbal stimuli.)

The life-element function of the existing self is also a source of stimuli from others or the environment for meaningful experience. This source of message stimuli is a very essential part of purposeful behavior and needs

further explanation--which is beyond the scope of this paper. Life element communication is always congruent--but often an undeveloped skill.

The Human Communication Model places each person as the nucleus of multiple relationships between that individual, the universe and other people within an interaction frame. Each person orders their world after perceptions from stimuli perceived and processed. Perceived stimuli implies sensory reception without processing. Each person's world is created by the perceived stimuli. Each person transmits personal meanings (existing order) to others in interactions. Perception of how the other person will receive one's state-of-being helps determine what verbal transmissions will take place and the degree of congruency between the message and the existing self.

Each person creates their own world. Each person wants to be understood and accepted. Each person would like to have others understand how their existence is. Each person would like to have another person perceive existence in similar manner to self. Messages are often transmitted from one person to another to help bring about consensual ordering of personal worlds. There are many principles and skills that influence the effectiveness of these interactions. Major principles and skills will now be described.

IV. PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS OF THE HUMAN COMMUNICATION MODEL

An individual is both a receiver and sender of personal messages between self and others and within self in simultaneous expression. An individual has the capacity to focus on a particular stimuli or part of a process and give undivided attention to it. Principles and skills are not mutually exclusive in their effects and affects on human communication. The following principles and skills have been arbitrarily divided into the specific focus points given. Understanding all the principles and skills and seeing the

interrelationships give more efficiency for understanding self and one another.

A. General Principles

There are, at least, four general principles (after Watzalwick, et.al., 1967) that influence the perception of stimuli and transmission of personal meanings for understanding one another's created worlds--their existing selves. These are:

1) Patterns develop to stabilize relationships. Because of the desire for order, individuals develop patterns of interaction so they can have expectations fulfilled. Often these patterns diminish perception and transmission of personal meanings. Patterns can be developed to amplify perception and transmission of personal meanings.

2) Meaning lies in people and not in the words (symbols) they use to express themselves. Both the transmitter and perceiver of personal messages must realize that meaning lies in the person and not in the conveyors of the meaning. Words are only conveyors--and often not as efficient as desired--of meaning not containers of meaning which can be transported to another individual.

3) A person cannot not be perceived. To exist is to be capable of being perceived by self or others. The important point is determining whether or not perceived meanings in the eye of the perceiver are representative of the existing person. Non-verbal communication stimuli are often hard to process accurately without some verbal exchange. Many misunderstandings arise out of imcomplete stimuli perceived about another individual. Assump-

tions are made which don't represent accurate states-of-being.

4) Each communicative behavior--verbal or non-verbal stimuli--contains a content and relational message. Relational messages need greater consideration in the processing of personal meanings (Bochner, 1978). Relational messages may come in three frames: feelings about the other person(s) in relationship, feelings about the content messages, and feelings about one's own state-of-being. Any relational message that is incongruent to the content message creates ambiguous understanding. Most conflicts result from relational messages which contest the worthwhileness of the individuals while the battle field lies in the content messages. Conflicts are much more efficiently processed by seeing the relational contesting and resolving that before processing content messages.

B. Image Building

Individuals live in symbolic worlds (Pauly, 1977). As the individual realizes that interaction within self and between others is based on images created from perceived stimuli to represent personal states-of-being, they are more open to up-dating images which are more currently congruent to the individuals' states-of-being. Image building is a central skill to the process of creating personal meaning. Each individual creates an image about himself, others and the tangible and non-tangible environment. These images are then ordered in relationship to one another--therein lies the creation of meaning.

An awareness of the ordering of perception to create wholeness in one's symbolic world is essential to effective communication. As

individuals realize the ordering processes within themselves they are open to realize that others may order the same phenomena in a different way. Each creates their own symbolic (real) world. Each can learn to respect another individual's perceived world.

To develop the most accurate images about self and others, another principle and skill is very important. This is the construct of separating worlds. As an individual creates an image about another individual, it is most essential to accurate image building to focus on stimuli coming from the other individual's world. Too often receivers mix stimuli from their own world and the image created about the other person represents something quite different than the other person's state-of-being. This is often processed in the following manner: A speaker transmits personal meaning and the receiver (perceiver) transforms those stimuli in terms of how they would fit in his (the perceiver's) world. The speaker is left feeling misunderstood, or not understood.

Separation of worlds is the process of seeing how stimuli in either/both worlds fits uniquely in those worlds to allow for individual identity. Separation of worlds is seldom used in communicative actions between individuals. Lack of separating world--seeing what belongs to whom and how--is always a constraint in conflict situations. As worlds are separated, conflicts are minimized greatly because individuals become responsible for their own behaviors/feelings/perceptions and not the other individual's behaviors/feelings/perceptions.

Another very important skill in effective image formation is that of verification feedback. Verification feedback is the process of the listener interpreting the stimuli and creating an image about the

speaker. The listener sends that image to the speaker who verifies (confirms or clarifies) the image held by the listener. This process helps assure accurate understanding. The listener has a verified image of the speaker; the speaker knows the image dimension held by the listener in respect to that particular aspect of the speaker.

Verification feedback as a skill comes at three levels: parroting, paraphrasing and personal essence. Parroting is least desired and can become offensive to interaction. Paraphrasing is interpreting images out of content messages received from verbal personal meanings. Personal essence is interpreting content and relational messages from stimuli coming from verbal, non-verbal and life-element transmissions. This skill can be conceptualized fairly well cognitively but the experiential understanding takes a lot of effort and refinement--particularly at the personal essence level.

C. Listening/Speaking Processes

The listening process and speaking process are for different purposes but they have two commonalities in the process of understanding and being understood, respectively. Each are involved with the flow of stimuli upon which images are created about one another. Each have both facilitative and barrier responses influencing the stimuli flow. Barriers in the listening process include: defending one's position, seeking entrance into the conversation, being pre-occupied with personal concerns, having a closed perspective, and giving advice. Each of these actions/attitudes distort or deflect stimuli from the speaker. Barriers in the speaking process include: imbalanced relationship, mode of delivery, incomplete/incongruent messages, disowned responsi-

bility, and inappropriate assumptions about the listener's previous understandings. Each of these barriers results in stress or strain in type or amount of stimuli resulting is poor image formation.

Listening and speaking facilitators help amplify the stimuli processed to assure more accurate understandings. Listening facilitators include: acceptance of speaker--not necessarily agreement with but understanding how the speaker's world is ordered; listener versus speaker responses--responses which keep focus placed on the original speaker rather than re-directing focus to the listener as a new speaker; verification feedback--the process of gaining confirmation to images created; and offering silence. Offering silence as a listening skill is little understood and seldom used. Offering silence as a skill is far more than remaining quiet while the speaker may be thinking (communicating intra-personally). As a skill, silence is used to pick up on non-verbal stimuli which are ever present and life-element stimuli which can be used in continual image formation about the speaker's world. Reflecting on past stimuli and previously held images in a re-ordering mode is also part of the skill--at all times focus remains on the speaker and does not return to the self when silence is used as a skill.

Speaking facilitators include: prefacing messages that may be hard for the receiver/perceiver to process--requiring separation of worlds for both listener and speaker; accepting responsibility for one's state-of-being and sharing it for understanding and not for required agreement; asking to be understood--inviting others' undivided attention to the speaker for understanding how the speaker's world is put together; and speaking vis-a-vis the relationship.

Speaking (personal meaning transmission) is the substance of which relationships are made. Each member of a relationship has both a right and requirement to share their world with partners to allow for the maximum growth or interaction in the relationships.

Listening and speaking skills can be easily understood cognitively. The experiential understanding--gaining a feeling for their use requires concentrated efforts. New worlds open up to those who gain the experiential understandings of these skills--Phase II.

D. Identity Dimensions

Man's concept of self--the who, what, why, where and how of existence--has a direct influence on how internal stimuli from the self and external stimuli from others and the environment are processed. There is a direct, though partially modified, relationship between how individuals process stimuli and their sense of well-being. Conflicts arise proportionately to the lack of perceived fulfillment in identity dimensions. An individual whose well-being is very low is open to be challenged by all stimuli perceived.

Identity dimensions are related to one's existing self. Eight dimensions have been defined which influence the well-being of an individual. The physical body needs nurturing in terms of food, rest, exercise to keep it healthy and functioning properly. The existing self also needs nurturing to keep well-being high and healthy. The nurturing process for the existing self is a skill. The skill is finding ways/activities/experiences where an expectation of fulfillment is achieved in each of the eight identity dimensions.

The eight identity dimensions (after Glasser, 1967) are not

mutually exclusive nor all inclusive of dimensions influencing the existing self. They have proved helpful, personally, to a number of individuals who have used them to nurture their well-being. They are now listed with operational definitions which are now being used in research (Stevens, 1980).

1) to love

   A person demonstrates love when his actions toward others helps the person to obtain growth and happiness.

2) to be loved

   A person is loved when actions from others helps the person to obtain growth and happiness.

3) competent and worthwhile to self

   A person feels competent and worthwhile to self when he performs important activities that meet personal pre-set standards and expectations.

4) competent and worthwhile to others

   A person feels competent and worthwhile to others when he performs actions valued by others in ways which meet their expectations.

5) open communication--sending

   A person feels openness in sending communications when thoughts, feelings and experiences are shared with others and that person feels understood.

6) open communication--receiving

   A person feels openness in receiving communication when another individual shares thoughts, feelings and experiences and feeds back his understanding to receive confirmation from the other

individual.

7) sense of direction

A person feels a sense of direction when he has a purpose for life and takes actions to fulfill that purpose.

8) sense of self control

A person feels a sense of self control when he takes responsibility for his actions and decisions about himself, relationship to others, and to the environment.

Observations from and about a number of individuals have shown a direct relationship between identity dimension fulfillment and interpersonal conflicts. As individuals dip in expected fulfillment of one or more of the identity dimensions, they become open to contesting one another in interaction. Low fulfillment correlates with lack of separating worlds, poor use of listening and speaking skills and higher levels of conflict.

Individuals can fine tune their communicative abilities by assessing their state-of-being with regards to each of the eight identity dimensions and actively doing something to find satisfactory levels of fulfillment. Awareness of the nurturing function of these dimensions on the existing self is a first step toward developing a skill for helping to assure acceptable levels of fulfillment for well-being.

E. Relationship Resolution

Individuals each create their own personal meanings. However, these meanings always involve the existence and interaction with other individuals when two individuals have developed different meanings (perceptions for expectations about interaction) then conflicts arise.

All conflicts involve relational misunderstandings but most often show up as symptoms in content messages. Individuals can only agree to disagree when they have balanced and accepted relationships.

Most interpersonal conflicts need to be processed first from the point of view of "relationship resolution." There are eight principles of relationship resolution: validating the relationship, being an example, involving the partner in the problem/concern and not in the solution to the problem/concern, organizing messages, handling offenses, seeking understanding, accepting reconciliation, and adding support through touch (Strong, 1980b). These principles may be used singularly or collectively depending upon the stress, or perceived level of possible stress, in the relationship and the foundations for stressful interaction.

One important skill in relationship resolution is that of relationship assessment. All too often stress/strain is not removed from interaction because feelings in the interaction are not owned and processed. Relationship assessment involves each person stating how they feel about self, the partner(s) and the relationship. The concern here is to find out HOW NOT WHY a person feels as they do. It takes but a moment to assess a relationship and allow each person to own their feelings (separation of worlds and verbal transmissions of state-of-beings). All too often individuals in relationships try to reduce/process feelings about each other in the content message exchange that only hides (and may exaggerate) the negative feelings in the process. Once individuals have owned their feelings, they can quickly process them for further interactional discussion/decision making OR they can choose to set another more appropriate time to

process the problems/concerns/interests.

A sense of timing is very important skill for invididuals to learn for effective interaction. Sense of timing applies both to what each person can process themselves and what their partners can process within a situational setting, such as being tired, hungry, pre-occupied, worlds not being separated, and other temporal/situational factors that diminish effective signal processing. In the skill of sense of timing is the need for each person to become aware of their own state-of-being for processing and helping their partner to become aware of their state-of-being for processing. These states-of-being need verbal expression so that each partner has a similar frame of reference of continuing/discontinuing a given level of interaction.

There is one more skill/pattern for keeping relationships open and free from stressful encounter. This skill/pattern is a family council (roommate/office partner/social organization council) wherein problems/concerns/interests are discussed on a regular basis to keep concerns from stockpiling to exploding points. Briefly, the council runs as follows:

1) Each person can introduce one item per meeting,
2) alternatives are looked for to fulfill the desired needs/interactions, and
3) decisions are made and worked on for a week (between meeting periods) and then re-discussed to see if the alternative(s) selected were the ones to best fulfill individual and relationship needs and expectations.

Many situations can be foreseen and/or worked on before interactions get caught in negative modes. One caution, to only be problem

oriented can mire the interaction. Some positive concerns/interests need to be processed periodically along with potential/actual negative concerns/problems.

F. Conflict Resolution Procedures

With each individual perceiving stimuli and creating their own meaning and with variation in the well-being and temporal constraints for individuals, conflicts will arise occasionally. These need not be devastating to the individuals or the relationship as skills (steps) in conflict resolution are understood and practiced at an experiential level. (These principles and skills need much greater elaboration than is the focus of this paper.) Briefly, the steps of the conflict resolution model (Strong, 1975) are:

1) Recognize differing perceptions about situations/expectations and negative relational messages which create the stress and contesting of one another. Apply various principles and skills of relationship resolution. Validate each person's perception by acknowledging their point of view about the interaction.

2) Set an appropriate time to discuss issue level conflicts or to discuss unfulfilled expectations of the identity dimensions which give rise to relationship contesting. Usually a conflict emerges because one or both parties are not prepared (sense of timing needed) to process stimuli from self or other.

3) Determine the relationship between the defined conflict issue and each individual's level of expected/perceived fulfillment

in the identity dimensions. (Unfulfilled needs are usually the underlying forces behind imbalanced relationship, lack of separating worlds, defensive interactions and all other factors leading to the challenge of stimuli from self, other or the environment.)

4) Through the skill of verification feedback each person's world is shared and understood by the partners. Ownship of particular alternatives for issues by an individual is gone. Understanding of levels of fulfillment (usually in the one lacking) is realized by both partners about each other and self. Contesting in the interaction is gone and a problem solving, cooperative base is established for decisions that are made from this point.

5) Alternatives are selected, based on the alternative's merit to serve the mutual interest of individuals and the relationship, to best bring about closure for issue concerns. Alternatives are also selected to help partners find greater levels of fulfillment in identity dimensions where there is need. (This latter set of alternatives is to work at the cause level of conflicts rather than the symptom--issue--level.)

6) Implementation and evaluation of the alternatives allows for change in interaction that support the growth of both individuals and the relationship. Implementation specifies who is responsible for what and when. Evaluation is set at a given period later to see if the implementation was complete and if there are other alternatives that may better fulfill needs and interests of individuals and relationships at the current time.

The conflict resolution procedures can be (and have been) used in problem solving situations where contesting of one another has not entered the interaction. Finding relationships of goals/activities/directions to identity dimensions is a valuable way to keep oneself and partner nurtured in identity fulfillment or at least to bring awareness to levels of fulfillment. The conflict resolution model procedures could be used in the family council program as an excellent way of helping younger family members learn constructive ways to solve problems and interact with others to allow for a full set of feelings and ideas to be expressed and processed.

G. Life-Element Communication

The principle of life-element communication is the perception of stimuli beyond the sensory receptors. The existing self of each individual is capable of experiencing messages from other existing selves and from a transcendental, ordered cosmos. There is an ecology of existence to which the life-giving element of every person can participate. The skill comes in learning how to percive this stimuli in the perceiving self for ordering meaning in one's life from this level of stimuli messages. The sensory receptor world view, particularly in the academic world, has done much to create a denial of stimuli experiences of this nature.

Many of the great discoveries/inventions (MacKinnon, 1962; and Clark, 1971) have come as the individuals have tuned into physical, aesthetic and scientific realities beyond the senses. These stimuli do not (have not) allow for control but they can be used for relationship enrichment as the skill of perceiving this level stimuli is developed.

Like love and happiness, life-element communication cannot be forced or controlled. There are some underlying conditions which seem to be present in reception/perception of this level of communications.

1) Awareness of this level of communication is important in being open to perceive this type of stimuli.
2) Reflective periods when individuals meditate on their own existence and relationship to the transcendental world often are associated with life-element communications.
3) Learning to "feel" interactions with others rather than just "think" interactions also helps in perceptions about one another from existing self to existing self transmission of personal meanings.
4) One other condition that seems to have a great bearing on perception at this level is sharing experiences with others about this type of experience. Those who accept this part of their existence seem to develop greater sensitivity to it.

V. A FINAL COMMENT

There are principles and skills involved in the communication process which can be learned and taught. The level of understanding sets of interrelated principles and skills will influence the level of interaction in relationships. Individuals need an opportunity to develop cognitive/symbolic understandings of the principles and skills; but they also need to develop an experiential/feeling understanding in order to use those principles and skills in building and enhancing relationships. A three phase approach can be used in the teaching and learning process to accomplish that end.

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DIAGRAM 1 THREE PHASE APPROACH TO PRINCIPLE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1

DEVELOPING AWARENESS PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS

[COGNITIVE (THINKING) UNDERSTANDING]

VEHICLES

1 - Readings and discussions

2 - Critiquing examples using communication concepts (case/situation study approach)

3 - Role playing--depicting correct and incorrect examples of principles and skills

4 - Observation log: personal definitions of principles and skills with specific situations cited and analyzed

5 - Written assignments (1st experience) two weeks charting listening/speaking behaviors of self

6 - Films and video tape scenes are used to discuss principles and skills

EXAMPLES

☐ Creation of meaning

☐ Separation of worlds

☐ Relationship resolution

☐ Verification feedback

☐ Listening process skills

PHASE 2

ASSIMILATION OF PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS

[EXPERIENTIAL (FEELING) UNDERSTANDING]

VEHICLES

1 - Structured laboratory experiences to develop specific skills and experience specific principles

2 - Written assignments (2nd experience) example 2 weeks of working toward specific changes in selected listening and speaking skills

3 - Structured sharing experiences of principles and skills with another person

EXAMPLES

☐ Assessing states of being laboratory exercise

☐ Sharing positive and negative experiences structure exercise

☐ Sharing experience with partner in understanding barriers and facilitators in listening/speaking processes

PHASE 3

APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS

[COMBINED THINKING/FEELING UNDERSTANDING]

VEHICLES

1 - Structured sharing experiences turn into helping partner work through specific concerns after third to fourth session

2 - Case studies via films or video tapes to look at communication process and strategies for helping others

3 - Final exam is application oriented

4 - Group facilitators are selected from previous members to help in the structured laboratory experience

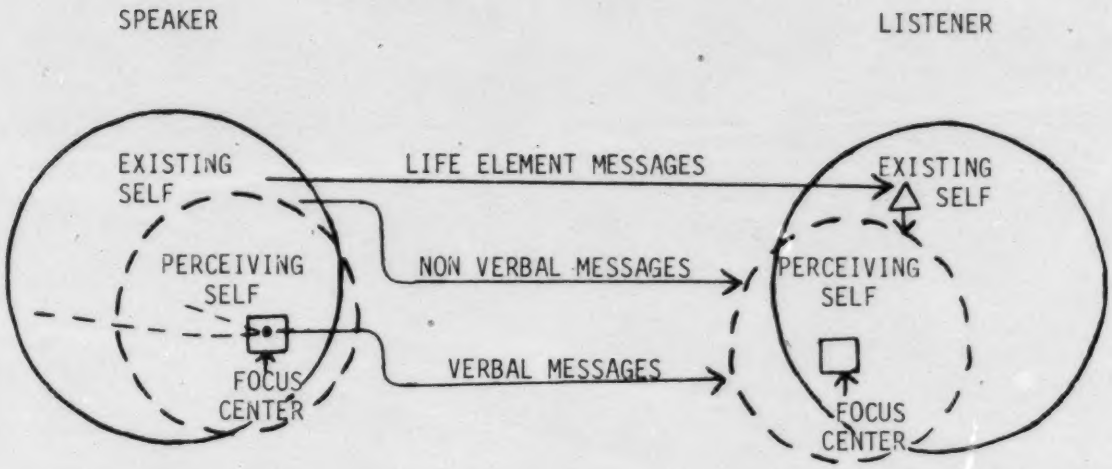
5 - Life, per se, is an arena for continued use of communication concepts

EXAMPLES

☐ One person helps the sharing partner see how to use exploratory behavior to change a relationship

☐ Individuals often share a personal situation in which principles and skills can be viewed

DIAGRAM 2 A COMMUNICATION TRANSACTION
WITH A DESIGNATED SPEAKER AND LISTENER



SHOWN STIMULI

1 - Stimuli from speaker's existing self and perceiving self are transmitted in verbal signals to the perceiving self of listener.

2 - Non-verbal stimuli from speaker's existing self is perceived by listener's perceiving self.

3 - Life-element stimuli go directly from speaker's existing self to listener's existing self. Listener's perceiving self perceives these messages as impressions.

STIMULI NOT SHOWN BUT PRESENT

4 - Listener is simultaneously receiving stimuli from self and the environment. In effective listening, the listener focuses primarily on stimuli from speaker to major exclusion of other stimuli.

5 - Listener is simultaneously sending non-verbal and life-element transmission of self to speaker while focused on speaker's messages.

6 - Speaker is receiving stimuli from environment.